The Influence of Early Marriage on Shaping the Language of Pakistani Women: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected Interviews
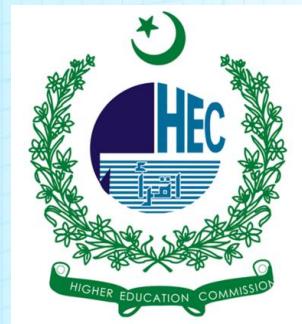
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Abstract

This study explores how early marriage affects the language and communication of Pakistani women. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews with eight women who married at a young age. The responses were analyzed using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework to understand changes in their communication, self-expression, and social interactions. Data were collected in Urdu and carefully translated into English to preserve original meanings and cultural nuances for Critical Discourse Analysis. The findings show that early marriage initially brings confusion, hesitation, and challenges in expressing oneself, but over time, women gain confidence and a stronger voice within their families and social circles. This study highlights how social expectations and marital responsibilities shape language use and personal expression.

Keywords: Early Marriages, Critical Discourse Analysis, Pakistani Women, Patriarchy, Power and Ideology, Identity

1. Introduction

Language is not just a collection of sounds or symbols it is a dominating social power that builds human reality. Language is the only thing that individuals use to express their ideas for identity and through the use of power relations to interact in society. Language is the primary medium for people to create social meanings and pass on cultural values. As Hall (2003) points out that speaking is never neutral rather, it is very much interwoven with the social structures, ideologies, and the expectations of the everyday life that control it.

Discourse and its ties to language have been among the leading issues in linguistics and social sciences disciplines. Fairclough (1992) gives us a definition of discourse as the world represented in a social way by society and through its structures. Discourse is not only about the words spoken or written; it also includes the institutional norms, the ideological frameworks, and the social perceptions which are common in that society, and the language used is produced, interpreted, and circulated accordingly.

The phenomenon of early marriage, where girls are married off before being able to

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come up to the marriage emotionally and psychologically, establishes new social roles and expectations that directly impact the linguistic behavior of the girls concerned. The minute young girls become part of the marital households, they find themselves in environments ruled by power, cultural, and gender relations that are and have been hierarchical. The changes in communication are not unpredictable, they are indications of the internalization of the cultural expectations that portray obedience, modesty, and emotional self-control as the desired qualities of young brides.

Educational background is a major factor that influences linguistic shifts. Women without proper education usually have poor linguistic confidence and limited expressive strategies which makes their situation inside the marriage more vulnerable to linguistic control. In spite of a good amount of research from the sociological or psychological viewpoints on early marriage, the linguistic aspect still is not much explored that examines the role of early marriage on women's language, power dynamics, and reproduction of gender ideologies. The existing gap is especially critical in a place like Pakistan where early marriages are steeped in cultural and patriarchal norms that regulate women's speech and behavior.

In this perspective, the proposed research intends to investigate the changes in female language induced by the early marriage with the help of Fairclough's CDA model. The research focusing on the spoken discourse of early-married women aims to unravel how they manage to come through their identity, power, and social expectations in their everyday talk. It also aims to investigate how the ideologies of obedience, respect, domesticity, and gender hierarchy become inscribed in their speech patterns. By critically analyzing their communicative strategies, this research wants to expose the discreet yet strong ways in which discourse influences women's life experiences and mirrors broader social structures.

This research comes to the point of being a major contributor to the comprehension of early marriage by interlinking the usage of language with social power and ideology. It reveals the dual role of language in the society, first being a means of communication and second the arena where social inequalities go through either reinforcement or challenge. This research, by giving priority to the utterances of early married women, seeks to provide knowledge that would be beneficial for the

fields of linguistics, gender studies, and social policy and also to women's empowerment through their being granted more rights and access to the linguistic and social resources.

1.1 Research Objectives

1. To examine the effects of early marriage on the interaction patterns of women in social setting.

2. To identify how early marriage and less education influence women's discourse practices, confidence and identity construction.

3. To analyze the language of early married women within patriarchal societal norms and expectations.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the effects of early marriage on the interaction patterns of women in social setting?

2. How early marriage and less education influence women's discourse practices , confidence and identity construction?

3. How the patriarchal norms and societal expectations shape the language of early married women?

1.3 Problem Statement

Early marriage is a social issue that has been discussed widely but its effects on women's language use has not been explored in linguistic research. Young girls often use language which reflect societal expectations like being polite and avoiding direct disagreement, but these habits have not been analyzed through the CDA lens. Only a few studies have shown how the deep- rooted ideologies about gender have filter into the speech of early married women. This lack of research builds a gap that how early marriages construct women's linguistic behavior and existing power relations of inequality.

1.4 Research Significance

This research is important because it shows a new aspect of the linguistic field that has barely been considered: the effect of early marriage on women's speech and communication. Through the application of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, the researchers have depicted the interrelation between women's discourse and gender

stereotypes, for instance, being quiet, polite and obedient has become one of the ways through which women communicate in everyday life. It is very important to study these language patterns, as they are crucial in the process of uncovering the social and cultural pressures that influence women's identities and at the same time limit their access to communication power. The results of this research can easily be incorporated in gender studies, feminist linguistics and discourse analysis. It can also bring help to the social workers, and policymakers who will be able to better understand the necessity of the youth marriage support programs that aim at building-up married women's self - expressions and raising voice.

1.5 Delimitation

The research presented here is limited to early-married women and planned through Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, to find out how their language use changes after marriage. Only data collected through   interviews   and no observations, recordings, or written documents are   used in the study. The focus of the research is on the social and linguistic aspects of early marriage, while psychological, legal, and economic dimensions have   not been   mentioned. Moreover, the study is based only on participants from the specific research area selected by the researcher, which closely links the findings to this defined context.

2. Literature Review

Saleh, Othman, Ismail, and Shabila (2022) analyzed the perceptions of the community with respect to early marriage in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. The study was qualitative in nature and utilized sixteen focus group discussions with people who had first-hand experience of early marriage as research method. The analysis was done in accordance with Van Manen's six methodological steps, thus ensuring depth and trustworthiness in interpreting the lived experiences of the participants.

The results of the study were such that they offered on the one hand a very complicated and, at times, contradictory view of the early marriage issue in the community. The majority of participants, however, described it as an inappropriate and socially damaging behavior even though it was still widely practiced. The study pointed out the heavily entrenched social, economic, religious, and cultural factors that continue to perpetuate the practice of early marriage even though there is a

growing awareness of its adverse effects. By presenting the voices of the community and the local perspectives, Saleh et al. (2022) provided a significant qualitative insight into the existing literature, giving a more grounded understanding of the ways early marriage is received, justified, and contested.

Nahdi, Ibrahim, Wathoni, and Fahrurrozi (2023) thoroughly analyzed the connection between early marriage among millennial women and the ever-increasing clarity of information and online transactions. To conduct this research, the authors employed an ethnographic survey, along with in-depth interviews involving 54 participants, and took Critical Discourse Analysis as a method to explore the language change. The results indicated that the vast majority of the investigated individuals, around 78% to be exact, got married at the ages of 15 and 16. The patterns of discourse suggested that early marriages were often legitimized as a proper practice and consistent with cultural norms.

In general, the researchers asserted that early marriage in this particular scenario served as a representation of symbolic violence obscured through linguistic normalization and ideologies that society sanctioned. CDA helped the study to reveal the power structures and economic worries that were not directly mentioned but were present in the discourse of early marriage among millennial women. Haberland, Chong, and Bracken (2004) look into the multidimensional drawbacks and social disconnection of married young girls in different parts of the world. Their study, which was intended for a WHO/UNFPA/Population Council technical consultation, provided a large amount of evidence that early marriage interacts with reproductive health vulnerabilities, limited educational access, and restricted social participation. The analysis revealed that married adolescents are regularly cut off from peer support and community participation, which leads to even more social isolation than their unmarried contemporaries. The consultation results pointed out the lack of programs that are specifically designed to reach out to the married girls with their particular vulnerabilities, even though the connection between early marriage, HIV exposure, reproductive rights violations and long-term socio-economic disadvantage is clear.

Haberland et al. (2004) through the integration of worldwide proof and policy talks,

played an important role in the literature of early marriage by bringing to the forefront married adolescent girls as a very needy population. Their research pointed out the dire need for such interventions that take into account the social, economic, and health-related limitations imposed by early marriages, thereby giving a very strong basis for future studies on power relations between genders and the actual conditions of girls already married at an early age.

Fatima, Fatima, and Anwar (2025), conducted the study that used Critical Discourse Analysis to compare Pakistani male and female matrimonial profiles in order to detect the ideologies underlying the discourses of marriage in digital spaces. The methodology applied was Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model comprising textual analysis, discursive practice and social practice. The researchers analyzed a sample of 30 profiles taken from two of the leading digital matchmaking websites in Pakistan, namely Muzz.com and Shadi.com. Their analysis revealed that the issue of marriage portrayed in the digital world today has not changed much and still reflects the old socio-cultural expectations, though through a different medium.

2.1 Research Gap

Even though the topic of early marriage has been extensively researched from a social, psychological, health, and educational point of view, the issue of how women actually use language after marriage at an early age is still very much unexplored. The majority of the existing studies look into the reasons and impacts of early marriage, but they seldom discuss how the way early-married women talk is determined by gender expectations, power dynamics, and social pressure. The rarity of CDA-based linguistic studies gives rise to a significant gap in the comprehension of the interplay between early marriage and female language.

3. Research Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature and utilizes a Critical Discourse Analytic (CDA)approach to examine the impact of early marriage on women's language choices and communication patterns. The aim of this study is to analyze the language of early married women within patriarchal societal norms and expectations. To meet the objective of the study, linguistic material has been acquired by means of semi-structured interviews with early married women. By Purposive sampling

technique data is collected by early married women as they can best infirm the research objectives. The sample size ranges from 8 early married women who got married before the age of 18 and they were willing to share experiences. The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and then processed as textual material for detailed discourse analysis. The analysis is conducted by first looking at the vocabulary, speaking strategies, politeness and turn taking that participants used when talking about their marriages. Each transcript has been thoroughly reviewed numerous times in order to pinpoint the recurring linguistic features that denote emotional suppression, compliance, resistance or change in identity. The interviews were originally conducted in Urdu, and participants responses were translated into English for analysis and presentation. To maintain the original meanings, cultural nuances, and emotional expressions, the translations were carried out carefully, ensuring conceptual rather than literal equivalence. The translated data were then used as the primary textual material for Critical Discourse Analysis. The research adopts a systematic interpretative approach to reveal the connection between the linguistic habits of these women and patriarchy, psychological burden and lack of choice, which are the typical conditions early married women struggle with. This research not only observes the linguistic expressions at the surface level but also shows the participant's communication in the marriage context influenced by the deeper ideological and social forces.

3.1 Research Framework

The research is based on Fairclough's (1992) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model that explains the connection between language, social structures, and power. The model consists of three interrelated dimensions: textual analysis, discursive practice and social practice, which together allow the researcher to interpret how individual linguistic choices are affected by wider sociocultural norms. The investigation employs this framework to reveal the gendered identities that early marriages impose on young women and how these identities become manifest in their speech, narratives, and everyday interactional patterns.

4. Analysis and Discussion

This analysis examines how early marriage affects the way women talk about their

lives, responsibilities, and personal experiences. By closely analyzing their narratives, it becomes evident that their language gradually changes as they adjust to marital life and learn to navigate new expectations. The participants' language reflects lived experience, emotional depth, and shifting social positioning. For instance, expressions such as **"*it's okay, I will manage*"** and **"*you tell me, I will do it*"** become increasingly frequent, replacing the more confident and informal manner of speaking they reported using before marriage. In many cases, women also begin to use phrases such as *"my in-laws said"* or **"*the family wants",*** indicating how their language becomes shaped by family authority, pressure, and responsibility. These changes highlight how early marriage influences everyday communication by reducing assertiveness and promoting polite, controlled, and duty oriented speech.

The data further shows that early marriage pushes young women into adult responsibilities before they are emotionally or linguistically prepared, and this shift becomes visible in their everyday language. In their narratives, expressions such as "I did not know many things" and "everything kept changing gradually" reflect uncertainty and growing awareness, illustrating a transition from confidence to hesitation. As responsibilities increase such as cooking, household management, and navigating new relationships statements like *"everything was difficult in the beginning" and "if there is support, everything becomes manageable"* demonstrate how their language becomes more reflective, cautious, and responsibility-centered. When participants mention **"*the time during pregnancy became quite difficult"*** and later state **"*now it feels like I have truly grown up",*** it reflects a shift from a childlike, inexperienced tone to a more mature and resilient voice. These linguistic changes demonstrate how early marriage transforms everyday communication from naïve and incomplete expressions into more structured, emotionally weighted, and duty-driven discourse.

Participants also express their emotional states and adaptation to early marriage through statements such as *"I felt confused and emotionally unprepared"* and *"I became more reserved and polite in my communication, especially with my in-laws."* Hedging expressions and modal verbs such as *"I think," "sometimes,"* and *"I felt"* occur frequently, indicating caution and uncertainty in self-expression. For

example, one participant states, *"I think societal expectations can be limiting, but I am trying to navigate them,"* highlighting the tension between personal agency and social norms. Lexical choices further emphasize restriction and responsibility, with recurring words such as *"freedom," "pressure," "adjustment," "responsibilities,"* and *"sacrifice."* One participant notes, *"Marriage slowed my personal growth because I had limited time for myself,"* illustrating the constraints imposed by early marriage.

The discourse strongly reproduces social and familial norms, with participants repeatedly reflecting the expectations of in-laws, husbands, and society. Statements such as *"I had to stay silent because people judge everything"* and *"I avoided arguing and tried to speak politely because of family expectations"* demonstrate the internalization of social norms governing women's behavior, particularly in early marriage contexts.

At the same time, participants display subtle negotiation and resistance. Statements like *"I learned to balance respect for others with being true to myself"* and *"women should start speaking up for their rights instead of remaining silent"* indicate efforts to assert autonomy within restrictive structures. Communication styles also adapt according to household power relations, as reflected in statements such as *"I had to address my mother-in-law differently after marriage,"* which illustrates hierarchical relationships and linguistic accommodation. Early marriage significantly influences identity and self-expression. Many participants describe a shift from being confident and independent individuals to adjusting themselves to marital and familial roles. Statements such as *"I was confident before marriage, but many things changed afterward"* and *"I had less time for myself, which slowed my personal growth"* reveal how marital expectations directly shape communicative behavior and self-perception. Participants also report social isolation and reduced autonomy, as marriage restricts their participation in social, educational, and community activities. One participant explains, *"I could not attend school functions or meet friends because I had to manage household responsibilities."*

The language used by participants reflects patriarchal structures and gendered expectations. Respect for elders, careful speech, and prioritizing family needs over

personal aspirations illustrate how societal norms are reproduced through discourse. Statements such as *"in most in-law households, no one supports women in building a career"* highlight structural inequalities and limited access to education and personal development.

Early marriage also affects education and personal growth. Participants frequently refer to interrupted studies, delayed career ambitions, and reduced opportunities for self-development. Statements such as *"I wanted to continue my education, but marital responsibilities made it difficult"* and *"managing household work and family expectations left me no time to study"* demonstrate how social pressures constrain individual trajectories.

Despite these constraints, participants' narratives also reveal gradual empowerment and emerging agency. Over time, many women describe learning to express themselves and articulate their needs. Statements such as *"I started discussing issues openly with my spouse"* and *"I learned how to navigate societal expectations while staying true to myself"* indicate that language can also serve as a tool for negotiating autonomy and reshaping identity. Emotional expressions throughout the interviews reveal both psychological challenges and resilience. Phrases like *"I felt stressed, anxious, and overwhelmed"* alongside *"I have become more confident and learned to handle new situations"* demonstrate that while early marriage imposes significant challenges, it can also lead to adaptation and personal growth. This analysis demonstrates how participants' language use both reflects and challenges social structures, illustrating the complex interplay of gender, power, and identity in the context of early marriage.

5. Findings and Conclusion

The data from the eight participants reveal that early marriage has a profound impact on women's language, communication patterns, and social identity. Using Fairclough's CDA framework, the discussion is structured around textual, discursive, and social practice dimensions to understand how language both reflects and reproduces social inequalities in the context of early marriage in Pakistan.

At the textual level, participants reported significant changes in their way of expressing themselves after marriage. Many became more cautious, polite, or

reserved in their communication. For instance, one participant noted, "Since my marriage, I've noticed that I've become more reserved and polite in my communication, especially with my in-laws and older family members." Another shared, "I started addressing my mother-in-law as 'Ami' instead of 'Aunti' it was a change in my language that reflected the new social hierarchy I was entering." These statements illustrate how women's speech patterns are directly shaped by marital and familial expectations, highlighting the ways language becomes a tool for navigating new social structures. Early marriage, in many cases, restricted spontaneous self-expression, with participants reporting hesitation to share opinions or express emotions freely. As one participant stated, "I felt restricted while talking and sharing my opinions," indicating the internalization of social norms that prioritize obedience and deference over personal voice.

At the discursive level, the interviews reveal that language acts as a medium through which power relations and societal expectations are enacted. Participants frequently mentioned feeling the pressure of family expectations and patriarchal norms. One participant explained, "Family expectations made me more careful and sometimes quiet while communicating," while another remarked, "I had to adjust according to new responsibilities, and personal freedom reduced." These narratives reflect a discursive practice in which social hierarchies and gendered roles are reinforced through everyday interactions. The emphasis on politeness, avoidance of conflict, and careful navigation of household hierarchies demonstrates how discourse regulates behavior, constrains agency, and shapes self-perception. Participants' use of cautious or strategic communication is evidence of how language mediates power dynamics within the family and social environment.

From the social practice perspective, early marriage is revealed to have broader implications for women's agency, identity, and social participation. Many participants described the negative impact of early marriage on education, career prospects, and social interactions. One participant shared, "I wanted to continue my education, but marital responsibilities made it difficult," while another noted, "I became distant from friends and could not participate in social gatherings." These statements demonstrate how the personal experiences of language and communication

are intertwined with structural inequalities, such as patriarchal norms and social expectations around marriage. Furthermore, participants reported emotional challenges, including stress, anxiety, and limited autonomy, highlighting that early marriage is not just a personal experience but a socially mediated phenomenon that shapes their identity and life trajectories. For example, a participant remarked, "I often felt stressed and emotionally overwhelmed" underscoring the psychological and social consequences embedded in these discursive practices.

Another key finding is the gradual adaptation and negotiation of self-expression within these constraints. Over time, participants developed strategies to assert their voices while maintaining social harmony. One participant shared, "Earlier I would stay silent even if something bothered me, but later I started discussing issues openly with my spouse" reflecting an emerging agency within the confines of ma rital expectations. This demonstrates that while early marriage imposes restrictions, language also becomes a tool for subtle resistance and negotiation of power. Women's narratives reveal how they reconcile traditional norms with personal aspirations, using communication as a site to assert identity and navigate societal pressures.

This study shows that early marriage strongly influences how women express their experiences, emotions, and identities. Their language reveals a clear journey from confusion and pressure to gradual adaptation and increased confidence. Through their words, it becomes evident how social expectations, responsibilities, and limited awareness at a young age shape their ways of speaking and understanding their own roles. The findings highlight a clear relationship between early marriage, gendered power structures, and language use. Women's communication practices are shaped not only by individual experiences but also by societal expectations, in-law dynamics, and cultural norms around marriage. Early marriage limits personal autonomy, modifies self-expression, and affects social participation, yet women's adaptive strategies reveal resilience and negotiation within these structures. These insights support Fairclough's proposition that language both reflects and reproduces social inequalities, and demonstrate that discourse analysis is essential for understanding the subtle ways in which early marriage affects women's lives at linguistic, interpersonal, and societal levels**.** This linguistic change reflects not only personal growth but also the broader

social realities surrounding early marriage in Pakistani society.

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Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What is your age?

2. What is your highest level of education?

3. At what age were you married?

4. How many children do you have?

5. Are you currently working, studying, or a homemaker?

6. How has your way of communicating with others changed since your marriage, and what factors contributed to these changes?

7. Can you describe a situation where your communication style was affected by your marital status or societal expectations?

8. How do you think your early marriage has influenced your ability to express yourself in social settings?

9. Can you share an experience where you had to manage a difficult conversation with your spouse or in-laws? What did you learn from it?

10. How do you usually express your needs or desires in your relationships, and has this changed since marriage?

11. Can you describe a moment where you felt able to express yourself honestly? Why was it meaningful?

12. How do societal expectations about marriage and womanhood influence your language or communication style?

13. How has your role in your family changed since marriage?

14. How do you handle conflicts or disagreements with your spouse or in-laws?

15. Can you share an experience where you felt pressured to follow certain communication norms? How did you handle it?

16. How has early marriage influenced your sense of identity and self-expression?

17. Can you describe a situation where you felt your voice was heard or ignored? What was your response?

18. How do patriarchal norms shape the way you express yourself in different social

contexts?

19. How have your relationships with friends and family changed since marriage?

20. What do you think is the most challenging aspect of being a young married woman in your community?